

# FOR THE LOVE OF MUSLIMS

## *Lessons for Online Missionaries dealing with Muslims*

### **Lesson 17: Divisions in Christianity**

Remember Bilal from last lesson?

*I have studied more than enough about Christians but the thing is that practically they are not close to religion and there are many divisions in Christianity. All of them are entirely based on different myths. Although there are sects among Muslims, they all believe the same God. They believe in Muhammad (PBUH), they believe in the Four Caliphs, and they also believe in the one Qur'an (Holy Book of Muslims). - Bilal*

You may find that Muslim internet contacts like Bilal often point to the divisions within Christianity as evidence for the fact that it cannot be the true religion of God. At the same time, they may not even admit that Islam also has many divisions. How would you respond to this issue?

It is important to point out that the differences between most Christian denominations are related to surface issues, such as how to perform baptism or how to choose church leaders. We should emphasize that all true Christians and denominations agree in the important matters; we all believe in one Creator God, and that Jesus Christ is the only way to God. And of course there is a lot more that we all agree on! In fact, this is a great opportunity to share the gospel with the internet contact. We can explain to him or her about the core beliefs that all Christian groups agree on – that is, the good news of Jesus Christ.

Many Muslims have a certain misunderstanding of Christianity that leads them to scoff at the divisions they perceive. A foundational difference between Christianity and Islam is that in Islam there is only one correct, prescribed way to do certain outward things (e.g. in worship), whereas in Christianity there is much freedom in outward things and it is the heart that matters. Most Muslims do not realize this difference; what may be surface issues to us could appear like very important issues to them.

For example, Muslims believe that there is only one correct way to perform daily prayers – and different Muslim sects have different ways to do them, each believing that their way is the correct and only way. In Christianity, the Bible does not tell us how to perform the outward actions of prayer. We can do it any way we want. So one denomination may choose to kneel in prayer, while another denomination may prefer to stand and raise their hands when they pray. This difference in style of prayer (and in denominations) is not a bad thing, but simply a reflection of the fact that the New Testament doesn't prescribe many things in relation to outward forms of worship. It can be helpful to explain this to Muslim internet contacts because this misunderstanding often underlies their questions about divisions within Christianity.

As an example, this is the email that an Online Missionary wrote in response to Bilal:

Dear Bilal,

*It is interesting that you say that there are divisions within Christianity. I think that most of the divisions are very superficial – that is, we all believe in a Creator God, we all believe that the Bible is God's Holy Word, that Jesus (Isa) is the promised Messiah, that it is through faith in Isa that we are able to enter into a relationship with God. Like Islam, there are sects. There is a larger separation between Catholics and Protestants – but from my conversations with my Muslim friends, this is very similar to the divisions between Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims. It is sad that just as Catholic and Protestant Christians have fought each other in the past, so have Sunnis and Shi'ites. Isa condemned all violence. He said, "I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:39-41)*

-Luke

This response is good because it is honest about both Christianity and Islam, yet gentle, not aiming to prove one better – and it ends by pointing the seeker to Jesus.

Send comments/questions to [flmcomments@nayajeevan.org](mailto:flmcomments@nayajeevan.org)